

**Testimony of Lizanne Cox
Director of Common Ground High School,
358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515
To the Legislative Appropriations Committee
Submitted February 16th, 2010**

Honorable Chair Toni Harp, Members of the Appropriations Committee;

I am testifying today in my capacity as Director of Common Ground High School, a unique urban high school located in New Haven. Founded as a charter high school in 1996, Common Ground's mission is to graduate college bound students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to live healthy, productive and sustainable lives. Common Ground employs an innovative approach to education, with the environment serving as the fundamental organizing principle of a results-based curriculum, and authentic learning as the primary vehicle for developing academic excellence, strong character, and a commitment to community in our students. Combined with small school support and a rigorous standards based curriculum, this approach has yielded real results for our 155 students. Last year, 93% of our students were accepted to college, and we were the only high school in Connecticut to exit "in need of improvement" status under No Child Left Behind last year.

Common Ground students, parents, teachers and staff have all worked exceedingly hard to make our school successful and are rightfully proud of what has been accomplished. Our success has been achieved despite the fact that, as a charter school, we receive on average \$3000 less funding per pupil than a public school in New Haven. As a result of inadequate funding, we have been unable to make the investments in technology and facilities that our students deserve. The few computers we are able to provide our students are over 5 years old. We have no gym, no auditorium, no art room, and a library that doubles as a classroom. We also make do with fewer support staff than you would find at most public schools. We are lucky to have a very passionate staff willing to stretch to fill the gaps that result from persistent underfunding of our program. But we cannot go on this way forever, and any additional cuts to our funding would have serious implications for our students.

I am sure you all agree that children are our future and the foundation of tomorrow's economy. For that reason, in hard economic times like those we face today it is particularly important that funding for education remain a top priority. President Obama has acknowledged that urban charter schools have an important role to fill providing an innovative experience that advances student achievement in a challenging environment. But we cannot continue to fill that role if we are inconsistently and inadequately funded. That is why I took the red-eye home from California last night – because I needed to be here to tell you how important it is to our students that their charter schools receive sufficient funding. As you go through the budget process this fiscal year, despite the significant challenges we all know you will be facing, please make sure our children's education is not compromised - commit today to adequate and equitable funding of Connecticut's charter schools.

Thank you.

Liz Cox

Director

Common Ground High School